

Testimony of Ethan Furious
HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination
Public Hearing of the Judiciary Committee
March 21, 2011

My name is Ethan Furious and I strongly support HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination, which would add gender identity and gender expression to Connecticut's non-discrimination law.

I'm writing this letter of unwavering support for HB 6599 not only because I believe that every person should be offered protection under the law from discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, credit, and education; but also because the passage of this bill would have an extremely beneficial impact on my emotional well being and financial security.

I'm a female to male transsexual, and the passage of this bill would change my life.

Ethan Furious is not my legal name. Ethan has been my legal first name for over six years, but Furious is merely a pseudonym. We live in a world in which Internet search queries are performed before a job applicant is even considered for an interview and in which a never-ending paper trail follows prospective home buyers throughout every step of the house hunting process. I participate in transgender-related activism and awareness promotion under a pseudonym because if my legal last name was ever linked with me being transsexual, intolerant or non-accepting staff members of employment agencies, credit bureaus, or housing authorities could decline my application because of that information. If I didn't take these extreme precautions, there's no telling what sort of discrimination and mistreatment could result, as protection against discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression under Connecticut state law currently does not exist. A person in their mid-twenties should not have to live in constant fear of their present and future economic stability, especially if this [in]stability is based on who they are. It's heartbreaking that I, and countless others, feel the need to silence our true identities in an effort to keep ourselves on the same level playing field as everyone else. Compromising one's identity in an effort to receive services and opportunities that were worked hard for, deserved, and/or are basic human rights is not the definition of equality.

This constant fear of discrimination, regardless of whether or not this discrimination actually occurs, does not dissipate if and when someone who is transsexual desires to or is able to physically change their body to appear outwardly to others as the gender that they feel inside. I have a beard, a deep voice, and underwent a medical procedure to surgically remove my breasts and create a male contoured chest. I'm never, ever mistaken as a female person. Even though this is true, I still live in constant fear that someone may discover that I'm transsexual and [mis]treat me accordingly. Although all of my government-issued documents, including my driver's license, birth certificate, social security card, and passport, state that I'm male, this fear constantly follows me everywhere.

When I applied for my current apartment, there was a question on the application that asked if I was ever known by another name. The answer was yes, but I checked no. What would have happened if I answered that question honestly and I put my very female-associated previous name on that application? What if my landlord discovered that my name not only used to be something else, but also that I used to be legally female when my credit check was run?

Or, in the case of many transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, What if I decided that I didn't want to change my name to something more "male", or wasn't able to change my name legally due to lack of resources? Would have I been offered a lease then, regardless of my very desirable credit score?

I'm *extremely* privileged that I had the resources to transition from female to male, especially at such an early age. While my story is important, it's crucial to acknowledge that most transgender and gender non-conforming people are forced to live in much more dangerous and uncomfortable situations than I do based on their lived experiences and access to resources. I'm, by no means, a poster boy of the transgender and gender non-conforming community. However, the fact that even the most privileged transgender and gender non-conforming people are not safe under the current anti-discrimination law illustrates the need for a more inclusive policy that includes gender identity and gender expression.

In 2004, gender identity and gender expression were added to Connecticut's hate crimes law. This bill was passed with an overwhelming amount of support from Connecticut legislators. Connecticut has made it clear that violence based on gender identity and gender expression will not be tolerated. The passage of that bill reinforces that legal protection on the basis of gender identity and gender expression is greatly needed for Connecticut residents. I urge you to consider the impact the passage of HB 6599 would have on the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming people. No individual should be denied from accessing services within the realms of housing, employment, education, or public accommodations because of the biases of others.

Transgender and gender non-conforming people are everywhere – in line at the grocery store, sitting next to you at the movie theater, holding the door for you, helping your college-bound student prepare for a big test during office hours, and providing you with health care services. And, that's where I am, too. But, in order for me to be the most productive member of society, I need to feel safe and economically secure. The protection of all Connecticut residents from discrimination, regardless of gender identity and gender expression, is an issue of equality and safety. I strongly urge you to support HB 6599. The passage of this bill would strongly affirm the state of Connecticut's commitment to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination for ALL of its residents.

Thank you for your time, and for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.